READY TO RECONNECT INSTITUTIONAL GRANT COMPETITION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) would like to address the most frequently asked questions on the Ready to Reconnect grant and the Adult Learner Focused Institution (ALFI) process.

THEC will periodically update this document as we receive questions from institutions.

CONTENTS

I.   GENERAL GRANT QUESTIONS:

How does THEC define adult learners?

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission categorizes adult learners as anyone over the age of 25 who is currently enrolled in a certificate or undergraduate degree program. For data reporting purposes, these parameters are the best way we can track adult student success.

Is there a specific undergraduate program of study that you would like to see addressed for this grant?

No.

How many grants will be awarded?

It depends on several factors, but THEC anticipates awarding between 8 and 10 grants in total.

My institution was closed due to the winter weather on the days the webinars were offered, and therefore we were not able to participate. Can my institution still apply for the grant?

While the RFP required participation in the webinar, THEC has chosen to offer an alternative to institutions that were affected by the winter weather on the two days the webinars were offered. THEC had planned to post the recorded webinars on our website. However, due to a technical glitch at CAEL, the sound was not recorded. Therefore we are going to post the slides from the webinar and this FAQ to the website instead. This information will be posted by Thursday, February 26th. We are tentatively planning to rerecord the webinar, but unfortunately that cannot happen until Friday, February 27. In short, we will attempt to post the recorded webinar, but we require that at the very least, affected institutions review the slides and FAQ posted on the THEC website.

Can my institution submit a proposal in partnership with another institution and submit another proposal independently?

This answer has two parts. First, only one submission is allowed per institution. Second, THEC will support a proposal from the proposing institution that includes collaboration with another institution *if it is determined from the ALFI process that this is a good course of action to better serve adult learners at the proposing institution.* We support and encourage external collaborations although it is not required for the purposes of this grant. But the institution submitting the proposal (1) is required to focus on how the external collaboration improves the way it serves its own adult learners, and (2) needs to base its proposal on the outcome of its own ALFI assessment. It's important to remember that the Ready to Reconnect grant is focused on helping institutions serve their own adult learners more effectively. Institutions may not receive funds from the Ready to Reconnect grant under multiple separate contracts with THEC.

II.   ALFI PROCESS QUESTIONS:

We are currently administering another survey from Noel Levitz (Adult Student Priorities Survey). Can we substitute it for the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI)?

No, the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI) survey is uniquely designed to be used together with the Institutional Self-Assessment Survey (ISAS); therefore, the Adult Student Priorities Survey will not work as a substitution.

How much does it cost to establish an ALFI account with CAEL and is it covered by the grant?

CAEL has worked with THEC to keep the prices down as much as possible. The institution is expected to cover the cost of the ALFI assessment as a match for the Ready to Reconnect grant and to show commitment for serving adult learners. ALFI costs are reflected below.

   ISAS - http://www.cael.org/pdfs/ISAS_OrderForm0807.pdf;

   ALI - http://www.cael.org/pdfs/ALI_CAEL_Order_Form08.pdf.

- Cost for ISAS:
    - o CAEL Members – $3150
    - o CAEL Non-Members – $3900
- Cost for ALI varies:
    - o Set up fee – $250
    - o Invitations to students –$0.25 each
    - o Analysis of responses – $2.30 each
    - o Handling fee – 5% applied to the total

For the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI) survey, is there a recommended percentage or number of students that should be contacted and asked to complete the survey? Should we include current adult students and/or graduated adult students?

The number of students will vary based on institution, but it is recommended that each institution has a 20 percent response rate on survey completion. It can be a combination of current adult students or graduates who attended your institution as an adult learner.

If we complete the assessment prior to May 15, 2015, will the results be released prior to June 15, 2015?

Yes, the sooner you complete the ALFI assessment process the sooner you will receive the results from CAEL.

What if we do not have a large adult population? Can we still participate?

Even if you have a small adult population at your institution, the ALFI assessment process will be useful for your institution to gauge how you currently serve that population and how your institution compares to others across the country.

Should we survey graduate students or only focus on undergraduates?

For the purposes of the Ready to Reconnect grant, we are most concerned with adults who are returning to school who might have previously stopped out of higher education. Therefore, the majority of the focus should be on the undergraduate population.

How are alumni pertinent to the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI)?

If your institution is interested in learning about the experiences of alumni who were previously adult learners at your institution, then it may be helpful to obtain their feedback. Each institution has the option to create ten customizable questions in the ALI; these questions could be used to understand the alumni perspective if an institution chooses to do so.

Do you need IRB approval to conduct the Adult Learner Inventory (ALI)?

Some schools have requested IRB approval and some have not. Please consult your institution's policies.

III.   PROPOSAL REQUIREMENT QUESTIONS:

Will proposals surrounding non-credit workforce certifications be allowed assuming the survey results support the effort?

We are supportive of adults receiving workforce certifications that increase and expand their career opportunities. At the same time, the Ready to Reconnect grant is aligned with Governor Haslam's Drive to 55 initiative, which relies on increasing the number of working age adults with credentials. Therefore, if we receive applications focused solely on workforce certifications, we will be looking for innovative strategies that allow students the opportunity to use those workforce certifications in programs that lead to additional, credit-bearing work. We would also expect to see a very strong rationale for focusing on workforce certifications based on the results of the ALFI and labor data.

It is important to remember that the goal of the Ready to Reconnect grant is to help institutions serve all of their adult learners more effectively, and not necessarily limit that support to adults in a specific program. THEC will be looking for proposals that strive for positive change across the institution.

Our grant proposal will be primarily informed by the results of the ALFI surveys. Considering the timeline, how much time does our institution actually have to write the grant proposal?

It is expected that you will begin to understand your institutional challenge areas during the ALFI assessment process and will be able to start the grant proposal before receiving the final results from the ALFI assessment. Each institution has until July 15, 2015 to submit the proposal. If your institution follows the timeline laid out by THEC, you will technically have one month between when you receive the results from CAEL and when the proposal is due. If you were to finish the ALFI assessment earlier than May 15th, CAEL will work to get your results to you within a month, and therefore, you could potentially gain more time to write the actual proposal.

On the scoring rubric, the Project Description plus the Goals & Evaluation equals 45 points. In the narrative of the RFP it says those sections are worth 55 points. Can you please clarify?

The narrative portion of the RFP is 55 points and includes the Project Description (30), Project Goals and Evaluation (15), and Budget Narrative and Budget Summary (10).

We have traditional campus programs that enroll a small percentage of adult learners, and we also have a separate Division of Adult Learning that is fully online and services are fairly self-contained. Can we focus our ALFI process and mini-grant proposal solely on the Division of Adult Learning in order to improve services in that Division and format?

You can focus your services on the Division of Adult Learning but with a caveat that you will collaborate with other departments and areas. It is often the case that divisions specifically designed to assist adult learners are well-equipped to assist this population while other areas are not. However, we encourage you to include all adult learners at your institution. We have found that often those adult learners enrolled in a traditional campus program

are those more likely to be underserved because they do not have access to the resources in a division focused on adult learning.

IV.   BUDGET QUESTIONS:

It is stated the cost of the ALFI assessment can be utilized as a match for the grant. I also see where salaries can be listed as an institutional match. Is there an overall percentage match we have to give for the grant?

The ALFI assessment is intended to be a match for the Ready to Reconnect grant in that it requires time and resources to complete. It proves that the institution is committed to serving adult learners on the front end. Salaries can only be covered up to 50 percent in grant funds because the grant activities should be sustainable in nature. If a position is fully funded by grant funds, then it will be difficult to continue the grant activities beyond the life of the grant period.

Institutions are responsible for matching 50% of salaries/benefits, and the ALFI costs can be used as part of the 50% match. Am I interpreting this correctly?

If an institution wants to use grant funds to pay for salaries and benefits, it can use grant funds to pay for only 50% of the total salaries and benefits costs. This is because often grant funded positions go away when the grant funds go away, and in some cases where programs are very people- and personality-driven, that means the work stops if this happens. Therefore, we are restricting the use of funds to pay for only 50% of salary and benefits, asking that the institution pay the rest and propose in the Sustainability Plan how they will continue to fund the position past the end of the grant.

We are asking the institutions to commit the financial and human resources to complete the ALFI process. Ready to Reconnect grant funds cannot be used to pay for the ALFI. We see the institution's commitment of resources to the ALFI as an institution's "match." Because the process is time intensive, those institutions that are willing to do it are institutions that we feel will be best positioned to make effective changes in how they serve their adult learners. The ALFI costs cannot be used as the 50% match toward salary and benefits.

From a budget standpoint, is the direct cost versus indirect cost process is similar to other grant opportunities? In other, larger grants, THEC allows a grantee to claim 8 percent of their award toward indirect costs. Because these grants will not exceed $50,000 we will not allow indirect costs. However, we have included an "operational costs" line item that could be utilized to cover some expenses normally covered by indirects. The operational costs must be directly related to the program activities.

Is there a list of non-allowable budget items?

THEC will develop and send specific guidance to all potential grantees prior to the grant proposal deadline, which will follow federal guidelines for allowable uses of grant funds. If your institution has administered a federal grant before, then these guidelines are similar to that of other federal grants. Some examples of federal unallowable expenses are included on the electronic code of federal regulations found here.

In addition, THEC will determine if there are other unallowable expenses. For example, usage of grant funds for direct payment of student tuition is not allowable. If your institution includes a line item on the proposed budget that raises questions, THEC will reach out to you for clarification.